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THE MARTYR:

A Tragedy.

BY THE

HON. MRS. ERSKINE NORTON.

. Faithful found
Among the faithless, faithful only he ;
Among innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, untterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal ;
Nor number, nor example, with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
Though single. MILTON.



LONDON:
SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.
1848.



CHARACTERS.

HENRY THE FIFTH.

LORD COBHAM.

ARUNDEL, Archbishop of Canterbury.

BISHOP OF LONDON.

SIR CLEMENT FANSHAWE, Governor of the Tower,
Uncle to Matilda.

LORD POWIS.

SIR EDWARD MORLAND.

GOVERNOR OF THE TOWER, succeeding Sir Clement.

FATHER ANSELM.

DE LISLE, a Deist.

GAINSBOROUGH.

CARLTON.

MATILDA VERNON.

LAURA.

Alone, apart, above, his fellow-men,
 By right divine their ruler and their judge?
 Therefore all human sentiments in him
 Must be chastised and mortified. Yea, e'en
 The tenderest ties of blood and of affection
 Let him be prompt to loose, whene'er the voice
 Of Church or State demands such sacrifice.
 If thus it be with nature's bonds, how rash
 To seek the bonds of friendship! how fond
 To deem that aught but their restraint is his!
 Friendship, familiar and confiding friendship,
 Argues equality; among his subjects
 A monarch hath no equal, therefore——

HENRY.

No friend:

'Tis hard, my lord archbishop.

ARCHBISHOP.

And therefore,
 Though he may cherish favourites, and surround
 Himself with confidants and counsellors,
 Yet are there none who ought or can approach him
 With the unshackled ease of private friendship.
 The heart-affections of a sovereign take
 A wider range: he is his people's friend;
 The church his sole adviser, and his best
 Support and comforter.

HENRY.

The range is wide.

ARCHBISHOP.

The eminence is high.

HENRY.

My reverend lords,
 To what doth all this tend? We love our people;
 The church we honour and obey.

BISHOP.

'Tis well:
 Our sovereign loves his people: let him, then,

Pluck from among them, with unsparing zeal,
Those poisonous weeds of heresy, which sprang
From the rank seed scattered by Wickliffe's hand;
He, who while pouring from the pulpit forth
Blasphemous errors, Lutterworth beheld
Struck by the wrath of Heaven.

ARCHBISHOP.

Our sovereign, too,
Doth honour and obey the Church; 'tis well.
Let him beware, then, how he cast his shield
O'er one condemned by her: and such a one
Is the Lord Cobham.

HENRY.

We demand but proof.

ARCHBISHOP.

Your grace hath our asseveration: and
'Gainst it let the Lord Cobham but advance
A public, open, unreserved denial,
The church rejoiced, will hold him free from blame;
Or let him read his solemn recantation,
Humble and penitent, the church once more
Will take him to her bosom, as a son
Saved from destruction, pardoned, and absolved.

HENRY.

Enough—these words are balm indeed! Ye ask
A public, open, unreserved denial,
And ye shall have it, reverend lords, be sure;
For we are confident, as of ourself,
That not the slightest stain of heresy
Sullies the faith of that good, pious man.

BISHOP.

God grant he may be found as free from guilt
As his indulgent sovereign can desire!

ARCHBISHOP.

Amen! We take our leave.

HENRY.

And we commend us

Unto your prayers and blessing, holy fathers!

[*Exeunt Priests.*]

What train of mischief hath been laying here!

Whence have these zealous prelates caught their clue,

That with such full assurance they arraign

A man so unsuspected, and so high

In rank and virtue? 'Tis most strange! Ho! there!

(*Enter ATTENDANT.*)

Despatch an instant message for Lord Cobham.

ATTENDANT.

Lord Cobham waits access unto your grace.

HENRY.

Admit him!

[*Exit ATTENDANT.*]

Ha! waiting access! perchance
Some rumour of this fearful accusation——

(*Enter LORD COBHAM, who would kneel, but the King raises
and embraces him.*)

Welcome our dear, dear lord! 'Tis passing long
Since we set eyes on thee; where hast been hiding?
What doing these weeks past? We miss thee much;
Thine honest counsels, and thy cheerful converse,
Are not with ease replaced.

LORD COBHAM.

Thanks, my kind master!
This warm and gracious welcome doth confirm
My anxious hope——

HENRY.

Thine anxious hope of what?
Dost thou, then, know?—Speak on.

LORD COBHAM.

Your grace!

HENRY.

Thine anxious hope——

Speak on!

LORD COBHAM.

That thou wilt deign, my liege,
To yield assent to my long-promised spousal
With thy most fair and noble ward, who now
Becomes of age, and ratifies the choice
Made by her royal guardian.

HENRY.

Ha, 'tis true ;
Matilda Vernon is of age. And she
Is thine, dear lord, according to our promise ;
Joyfully will we, ourself, bestow her.

LORD COBHAM, (*kneeling, and kissing his hand.*)

How can I thank my gracious benefactor
For this, his best and dearest gift ? My tongue
Halts in expression, while my heart beats high
With gratitude and rapture.

HENRY, (*raising him.*)

So, 'tis she,
The pretty thief ! that for so long a while
Hath stolen thee away.

LORD COBHAM.

'Tis true, with her,
At her good uncle's mansion, I have passed
Some happy weeks. Sir Clement hath returned
To take his charge as governor of the tower,
And his loved niece with him.

HENRY.

'Tis very well.
How happy dost thou look ! All hope, all joy,
All love ! with not a care or dread upon thee !

LORD COBHAM.

I have, indeed, to thank my God for much—
Far more than I deserve ; and I do thank Him
With my whole being's humble adoration.
Unworthy as I am, behold what blessings
His gracious will bestows ! My sovereign's favour ;
The love of her I love ; the esteem of friends,

Whose estimation is of sterling price.
 And to these added rank and wealth, yielding
 The enviable power of doing good
 To numbers of less happy fellow-creatures——
 Oh, sire ! have I not cause to be most thankful ?
 Without, indeed, a care or dread upon me !

HENRY.

Couldst bear reverse of fortune with as much
 Of patience, as thou wear'st her favours meekly,
 An all but perfect pattern would be given
 This evil world, my friend ?

LORD COBHAM.

Adversity
 Hath little tried me in her school, my liege ;
 Yet do I know too well my nature's weakness
 To boast its firmness, or its fortitude.
 If such a trial come, what could I do,
 Save to solicit from the throne of grace
 That strength, which grace alone can give ?

HENRY.

Thou speakest
 As is thy wont. And we do love to learn
 Lessons of pious wisdom from thy lips.
 From all such trials, may Heaven defend thee !

LORD COBHAM.

Amen !

HENRY.

This morn, my lord, two reverend prelates here,
 Argued that friendship, in its dearest sense,
 And fullest confidence, existed not
 For kings. I quoted thine. Now, good my friend,
 Hast thou a secret on that heart of thine
 Thou wouldst not own to us ?

LORD COBHAM.

My liege, I have
 No secret. My converse and my actions

Are free and open to the view of men,
As are my thoughts to God.

HENRY.

Then is it false !
That vile, calumnious rumour ! May a blight
Wither up the envious tongue that gave it air !

LORD COBHAM.

What means my liege ?

HENRY.

They do accuse thee, Cobham,
Of favouring, fostering, spreading, the abhorred
Tenets of that arch-heretic, Wicklyffe,
Who, by the hand of God, was struck, while preaching
His errors, hell-inspired, at Lutterworth.

LORD COBHAM.

If such their accusation, know, my liege,
That it is true. I favour, foster, spread,
The blessed tenets of our good reformer,
Wicklyffe, who, by the hand of God, was gathered
To his reward of glory as he preached
The truth revealed, heaven-inspired, at Lutterworth.

HENRY.

Hold, madman !—hold ! What words are these ? Speak, speak
Again, and tell us that our senses play
Their master false, yet staggering 'neath the shock
Those rude-tongued prelates gave. Speak—speak again !
We heard thee not aright.

LORD COBHAM.

My royal liege !
My benefactor, sovereign—more than all,
And dearer far, my friend—for so thou hast,
In thine indulgent goodness, bid me name thee,
Hear me acknowledge that an influence strange,
Unsought for, most benign, most powerful,
Had gradually inclined my mind to ponder
On the vast changes time had wrought upon
The simple, humble, self-devoting, and
All-enduring spirit of those first teachers,

Who, from the lips divine, conveyed the word
 Which gently breathed forth mercy, grace, and peace,
 Like holy dew, upon the souls of men ;
 Quenching their flaming passions, softening
 Their hearts of stone, humbling their towering pride.
 The bearers of this meek and powerful Word
 Went poor and barefoot on their heavenly mission,
 And taught *humility* as their prime lesson.
 I looked on them, and then I looked on those
 Who now fill up their places. I beheld
 Voluptuous raiment, and luxurious food ;
 Men bloated with intemperance, puffed up
 With monstrous pride, deep plunged in the career
 Of worldly warfare for the lures held out
 By avarice and ambition. Loud were they
 In contest upon points of no avail ;
 While the heart-worship of the Christian yielded
 To paltry forms and gaudy ceremonies.

HENRY.

My lord !—my lord !

LORD COBHAM.

One moment yet, your grace !
 'Mong these degenerated priests were found
 Some few escaping from the dire contagion,
 To rock, and cave, and lonely hermitage,
 Passing their useless days in solitude,
 In self-inflicted tortures, half insane.
 These, too, did I abjure, for they had strayed
 Like to the rest, though by a rougher path.
 I sought the Gospel in its purity—
 I sought, and found it not, till, heaven-led,
 Its voice thrilled on my heart in the meek tones,
 The simple worship, and the pious works,
 Of Wicklyffe's followers. There I found the Word,
 E'en as the star-led shepherds did of yore,
 Preserved and nurtured in obscurity:
 Like them, too, I bowed down, and worshipped it.

HENRY.

We marvel not thou keptst this precious finding
 Close hidden from our view.

LORD COBHAM.

To touch this chord
With thee, my liege, I bided for my time.
The hallowed change is yet but just matured
In my own breast, but just imparted
To those most near to, most dependent on me.
Warily, and by degrees, and at fit time,
I minded to have opened to your grace
This solemn matter. I have been forestalled.
May He, who ordereth all things for our good,
Grant that this prematurely forced disclosure
Retard not the great work that hath begun
In England's heart; and which I dare foretel
One day will be accomplished. He who sowed
This precious seed, saved from the plant of life,
Will cherish, rear, and in his own good time,
Expand it to unchangeable perfection.

HENRY.

With patience have we heard thee, good my lord,
With candour, too, we trust; with all our favour.
We will not moot deep questions, such as fit
Alone the learned and the holy men
Thou hast aspersed; who, heaven-appointed, lead
Their wavering flock the only sure, safe way.
We argue not; but as thy friend, entreat,
And as thy sovereign, command thee, to abstain
Open avowal of these noxious doctrines,
Or secret propagation. Strive to purge
Thy brain from this foul folly. If thou fail,
At least, betray it not—or fly from hence
And hide thyself in some far solitude;
Or seek for shelter in some foreign land
While yet thou mayst. We warn thee, my Lord Cobham,
The church will not endure a second Wicklyffe,
Too mindless of the first from mere contempt.

LORD COBHAM.

The church hath wisdom in her generation,
And with sound reason dreads a second Wicklyffe.
I dare not hope to stand in his high place;
His humble follower, meek disciple, I—
No more.

HENRY.

And such no longer must thou be,
Or seem to be, as thou dost value all
That makes life worth the having—or life itself.

LORD COBHAM.

Ha!—the churchmen threaten! Is it so, my liege?

HENRY.

We tell thee, man, all is at stake—thy love,
Thy wealth, thy life.

LORD COBHAM, (*aside.*)

I thank thee, Lord of Heaven
I hear thy call, and am prepared to obey.

HENRY.

What sayst thou?

LORD COBHAM.

Please, your highness, to make known
The intention of these prelates.

HENRY.

Merciful

As yet, and far more willing to believe
Thee innocent than guilty; or if guilty,
To forgive than to condemn—thus they decide:
The church rejoiced will hold thee free from blame
Upon thine open unreserved denial;
The which, if honest truth forbid thee make,
Then read the recantation of thine errors,
Humble and penitent, the church again
Will take thee to her bosom as a son
Saved from destruction, pardoned, and absolved.

LORD COBHAM.

Now, may it please thee, sire, to hear mine answer.

HENRY.

Not now—we will not hear it now! We read it
But far too clearly in thine eye's stern glance,
And in the firm compression of thy lips.

Away! obdurate as thou art. Go hence!
Retire, reflect, throw off the enthusiast,
And come back to this work-day world again
As thou wert wont, our own beloved friend;
We know thee not in this disguise. Leave matters
That concern them to the priests; we err not,
Following the sole guides that Heaven hath left us.
If they lead wrong, the sin be on their heads,
And not on ours.

LORD COBHAM.

When will your grace permit——

HENRY.

Sleep on it. The morrow, at this hour, return.

LORD COBHAM.

I take my leave.

HENRY.

Give me thy hand, dear lord.
May Heaven direct thee right.

LORD COBHAM.

Amen!—amen!

SCENE II.—*The Governor's Apartments in the Tower.*

SIR CLEMENT FANSHAWE and MATILDA VERNON, seated.

SIR CLEMENT.

Nay, niece, try not that book again. Within
This last good hour, embroidery, music, books,
Have each been taken up, and laid aside
Often enough to prove thy hurried thoughts
Will fix on none until they be at ease.
And yet at ease they may securely rest.
No obstacle can rise; with joy the king
Will ratify his word pledged to his favourite.
And then, a few short days will see thee wedded
To him thy heart hath chosen. Of all men,
The one I would have chosen for thee, niece.

MATILDA.

Happy am I, dear uncle, in thy full
 And free approval. Nought do I foresee
 Of hindrance or mischance. And yet, until
 I hear the blest assurance from his lips,
 I may not quite throw off all doubt, all fear.
 Kings are capricious ; and we know full well
 An artful rival is at work, to whom
 The frank simplicity of Cobham gives
 A vantage-ground.

SIR CLEMENT.

Thou mean'st Lord Powis. But what,
 With all his hate and rivalry, can he
 Advance against him? No, Matilda—no!
 If Cobham's frank simplicity in truth
 Give to his enemy a vantage-ground,
 His noble candour, firm integrity,
 The lofty virtue of his course of life,
 The affection of the king, the love and reverence
 Of all good men, a barrier throw around him
 All but impregnable ; the which to attack
 And not destroy, were utter ruin. So cheer thee,
 My own good girl. 'Tis natural, on the eve
 Of great events our fortune to mistrust ;
 But thou hast not the shadow of a cause
 To doubt of thine.

MATILDA (*aside.*)

It may be but a shadow !
 And yet how deeply doth that shadow darken
 The bright wings of my soaring hope. Alas !
 [*A horn is sounded.*]

(*Rising and approaching the side.*)

'Tis he, dear uncle ! Now the drawbridge falls ;
 And now he passes with his train——

SIR CLEMENT (*rising.*)

And now,
 Who'll laugh at all her little, trifling fears?
 I leave thee, child, for shrewdly may I guess
 My presence at this moment scarce preferred.

MATILDA.

Dear uncle !

SIR CLEMENT.

I wait ye in my study. [Exit.

MATILDA.

He comes !—I hear his steps. Away—away,
Ye coward doubts !*Enter LORD COBHAM.*

My dear, dear lord !

LORD COBHAM (*embracing her tenderly.*)
Matilda !

MATILDA.

Welcome, my happiness ! For such thou bring'st,
Loved bearer of good tidings ! In a word,
Say all is well !

LORD COBHAM.

Yea, all is well—and more
Than well : for God hath called us to bear
His Cross, and chosen us to vindicate
His truth. Rejoice with me, my love—rejoice !

MATILDA.

What means my lord ?

LORD COBHAM.

Some enemy, intent
To do me harm, hath worked me wondrous good—
Hath whispered to the churchmen that I cleave
To Wicklyffe's tenets ; they, in their turn, arraign
Me to the king.

MATILDA.

Oh, say not so !

LORD COBHAM.

The king,
Refusing to receive my instant answer,

Forces me delay it to the morrow,
 In the vain hope that, during these few hours,
 I may be worked upon by fear and love
 To change, or feign to change, to disavow
 Or to recant, what they are pleased to term
 My heresy abhorrent to the church,
 Because subversive of its most impure,
 Idolatrous and wicked innovations.

MATILDA.

Disavow ! recant ! what do I hear ? Oh !
 We are lost indeed !

LORD COBHAM.

Wherefore ?

MATILDA.

Well I know

Earth hath no bribe to allure, no terror
 To affright, when conscience bids thee forward.
 No—to each other, in this world, we're lost.
 Oh, God ! thy will be done !

LORD COBHAM.

Dear, noble girl !

I glory in thy judgment : but wherefore
 Are we to each other lost ? despoilment,
 Banishment, may be my lot—true.

MATILDA.

Thou knowest

If but despoiled, my fortune's thine : if banished,
 To the uttermost ends of earth I follow thee.
 Alas ! I fear it will be worse than either.

LORD COBHAM.

Nay, nay, let us hope not. A heavy fine
 'Thrown to the greedy and offended church,
 Banishment from hence, my own dear land, awhile,
 And from my king for ever—these I fear.

MATILDA.

God grant they doom thee to no more than these !

LORD COBHAM.

And wouldst thou bear the cross with me, Matilda,
And leave thy home of luxury—thy friends?
And wouldst thou quit thine uncle in his age?

MATILDA.

Ay, there would be the pang! When it pleased Heaven
To call both parents, he to his bosom took
The infant orphan, blessed and gently reared
His sister's child; and I had hoped to be
The staff and cheering light of his old age.
To leave him would be the one great sacrifice,
The only one. But I talk vainly: even
If thy life be spared, and fine and banishment
The only penalties, thinkst thou the king,
Or my good uncle, would not deem their promise
Of my hand annulled by such a verdict?

LORD COBHAM.

And if they deem so?

MATILDA.

My determined will
Might *not* secure escape to thee; though nought
That a determined will could do—and much
It can accomplish—should be left undone.

LORD COBHAM.

Matilda, though I believed thee capable
Of the most generous self-devotion, yet,
But for this stern trial, I had never known
The lofty magnanimity of soul which now
I contemplate in wonder. Hand in hand,
Firm in our love, and in our faith to Heaven,
The shocks of fortune we may meet unmoved;
Our spiritual nature soaring far above
Her envious reach, intent upon its home.

MATILDA.

Be it so!

LORD COBHAM.

We bow submissive to His will,
Who hath imposed this glorious task upon us;
And stand prepared to suffer all for Him,

Who suffered all for us. Let us in heart
 Unceasing pray for His support and grace,
 That we flag not in our appointed course.
 So, in the memory of man, Matilda,
 As landmarks we may stand midst the decay
 And foul defacement of the Christian church;
 Our names, with Wickliffe's, blessed as labourers
 At the great edifice. Though we cement
 Its crumbling walls with our heart's blood, what then?
 Do we not help to save the house of prayer
 From being made a den of thieves? Oh, think!
 If once it fall 'twill crush this world to atoms,
 This ingrate world, redeemed by God himself,
 And yet deemed in vain! hurled to chaos,
 Its orbit left untenanted, the universe
 Would marvel less at its annihilation,
 Than at its crime.

MATILDA.

God grant us strength to bear
 Our part in this great work!

LORD COBHAM.

Now my dear love,
 'Tis thine to good Sir Clement to repair,
 And break to him the truth, together with
 Our firm deliberate resolve. Meanwhile
 I will collect such followers and friends
 As I judge true unto the sacred cause,
 And tell them what has chanced, and warn, instruct,
 And comfort them, as best I may. Adieu!

MATILDA.

Beware Lord Powis—he is the informer.

LORD COBHAM.

The work is worthy of him, and by his work
 We know him. May God forgive His enemy,
 And ours! Farewell, my blessed one!

[Embraces her, and exit.]

MATILDA.

Farewell!
 Now to my painful task: apart from *him*
 Half of my courage fails. Support me, Heaven!

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*The Tower.*

The Bedchamber of SIR CLEMENT FANSHAWE, the Governor.

SIR CLEMENT.

I have not slept this live-long night ; or if,
Wearied with anxious thought, a feverish doze
Stole o'er me, 'twas filled up with images
Of pain and horror. Ho, there !

Enter SERVANT.

"What's the hour ?

SERVANT.

Eight hath just tolled. The messenger despatched
To the Lord Cobham hath returned with greeting ;
And the good lord will be here, sir, forthwith. [*Exit.*

SIR CLEMENT.

This is, indeed, a change I looked not for—
A fearful change ! E'en as she spoke, despair
Fell on my heart. I felt there was no hope ;
For I have heard that men, when once possessed
By the false demon, with desire to stray
From the straight path marked out by holy church,
Can never conquer it, but wander on,
Led by the accursed clue the fiend throws,
Till, lost in the inextricable maze,
They sink into perdition. Woe is me !

Enter LORD COBHAM.

My lord ! my lord ! I need not tell thee wherefore
I've hasted to beg thy presence here.

LORD COBHAM.

My dear and good Sir Clement, pray thee, believe,
In this dread matter nought afflicts me more
Than to give pain where least I would,—to thee,
And to my sovereign, so revered, so loved.
I grieve ye both ; to me the greatest grief !

SIR CLEMENT.

It rests but with thyself, dear lord, to cease
Paining the hearts that love thee ; filling them
With terror and dismay. Think, above all,
On that one heart, whose every throb is thine ;
Who lives but in thy life. Oh, think of *her* !

LORD COBHAM.

Think of *her* ! Whom next unto my God, I love !
Whose sister spirit, side by side with mine,
Will worship him to all eternity !
Oh, never do I cease to think of *her* ! Yet,
Not as thou thinkest. Her worldly welfare,
Her freedom from all care and sorrow here,
Alone engage *thy* fond, parental love :
Not so with mine. Yet grieve not for thy child :
She's bound with me upon a mission high,
And holy, and of great reward.

SIR CLEMENT.

Oh, where
Will this infatuation end, and whither
Doth it lead !

LORD COBHAM.

It leads to the redemption,
From the powers of darkness, of this great kingdom ;
The hope, the guide, the light of other nations.
'Twill end in glory to our God on high,
And peace and goodwill among men on earth.

SIR CLEMENT.

Now may the saints have pity, and release thee
From this hell-wrought delusion ! Fatal alike
In this world and the next—to thee, to *her*

Thou draggest with thee down the dread abyss.
 Oh, could I stop thy course, and bid thee pause
 While yet 'tis time ! This morn thy doom is sealed
 By the decision thou dost give the king.
 I'm an old man, my lord—my hair is white,
 And with a father's care I have reared up
 Her whom thou lovest so tenderly. Behold ! [Kneels.
 I kneel before thee ! I beseech thee to abstain
 From the fulfilment of this heinous sacrifice,
 Prompted by Satan, thirsting for thy blood
 On earth, and for thy soul hereafter !

LORD COBHAM (*raising him.*)

No more !
 My dear and venerable friend—no more !
 Embitter not, by useless adjuration,
 The cup that I must drain, the sacrifice
 I may be called upon to seal with blood.
 If so, be it acceptable to Him,
 Who made a greater sacrifice for us.
 Enough ! I go, Sir Clement, to the king.
 Expect me soon again. Farewell ! [Exit.

SIR CLEMENT.

Farewell !
 I feel that all is over. That the staff,
 On which my old age fondly leaned, is broken.

SCENE II.—*An Apartment in the Palace.*

KING HENRY. An ATTENDANT.

HENRY.

Is the Lord Cobham yet arrived ?

ATTENDANT.

No, sire !

HENRY.

The bishops will be here anon. Who waits
 In the antechamber ?

ATTENDANT.

Certain persons
With petitions, and my Lord Powis.

HENRY.

'Tis well.

[Exit ATTENDANT.]

I dread the upshot of this matter. Cobham
Is not the man who thoughtlessly adopts,
Or lightly changes his opinions and resolves.
Mild, yielding, even careless, in concerns
Of small import, but most immoveable
When once he takes his ground on questions high
And grave. These busy prelates too, intent
To do away the blame of negligence
Incurred by Wicklyffe's unchecked heresy,
Are prompt to seize the first occasion offered,
To visit with decision and severity
This growing crime, where'er it shows its head.
The nobler, the more eminent their victim,
The higher in my favour, so much the more
Their zeal will they approve to sovereign Rome.
In policy I dare not shelter him;
In conscience, ought I? But he is here.

Enter LORD COBHAM.

LORD COBHAM.

My liege!

HENRY.

Come, my dear lord, relieve our anxious thoughts,
That since we parted have not ceased to dwell
On thee, and on the dangers pressing round thee.
Thy calm, unclouded brow assures us that
Thou com'st to set us free from all suspense.

LORD COBHAM.

My sovereign, feeling, deigning to express
Suspense so anxious, is at once, indeed,
My joy and grief. Joy, as the dear assurance
Of yet unblighted favour; grief, alas!

As the precursor of approaching change,
Dreaded scarce less from being undeserved.
Sire, the answer I had given yesterday,
Hadst thou permitted me, I give to-day ;
The same that I would give to-morrow ; the same
That I shall render at the hour of death,
And at the throne of God.

HENRY.

Speak on, my lord !

LORD COBHAM.

My conscience doth forbid me to approve
The tenets and the practices of Rome :
And, not approving, I will not profess them.
Therefore her mode of worship I reject,
Embracing that which, in its simple form,
Meek spirit, and pure doctrine, drawn direct
From the unsullied source of gospel truth,
Approaches nearer to the holy height
Of its divine perfection. I have sought,
Constant in prayer, for light to guide my steps,
For grace to inspire, for strength of faith to uphold.
If I be wrong, may God and man forgive me !
But till such error be made manifest
As clearly to my conscience, as the sun
In heaven to my sight, I will not swerve.

HENRY.

We marvel at the strength of thy conviction ;
It passes custom, it impresses awe.
But shake we off its momentary power !
This is no time for parleying. We perceive
All hope to move thee from thy purpose vain ;
Thy safety, therefore, is our only care—
And how to accomplish that !

LORD COBHAM.

Think not of it,
Dear my sovereign ; events will shape their course,
Directed by unerring wisdom.

HENRY.

And she,

Thy destined bride?

LORD COBHAM.

Is well prepared for all.

HENRY.

Alas, what misery to thyself and thine
 Have these strange thoughts engendered! Would to God,
 We had never known or loved thee! What demon
 Whispered thy folly to the prelates' ears?

LORD COBHAM.

I cannot surely say, and will accuse
 No one on mere suspicion. List! they come.

HENRY.

Canst not escape?

LORD COBHAM.

What! and leave my sovereign
 To bear the brunt of their mistrust? No, sire.

(Enter a LORD IN WAITING.)

LORD.

His grace of Canterbury claimeth audience.

(Enter THE ARCHBISHOP, BISHOP OF LONDON, and several
 other Prelates. The LORD POWIS and other Lords.)

HENRY.

Welcome, my lord archbishop—reverend fathers—
 And ye, my noble lords, welcome to all!

ARCHBISHOP.

May it please your highness to make known to us
 The answer of Lord Cobham, (whom we find
 In presence here,) to that most heinous charge
 Advanced against him?

HENRY.

My lord, he doth confess
 The sin of being moved in great degree,

By the delusive arguments of Satan :
That prince of heretics, who erst in heaven
Produced the crime ; then, by his subtle speech
Infected our first parents, and ever since
Doth ply unceasing in the cause of error.
Personified in Wicklyffe, well we know
How fatally he spread his specious snares
Amongst the weak, and low, and ignorant.
Emboldened by success, he ventures forth
On higher quest : in an unguarded hour
He throws his trammels o'er the noblest mind
Our island boasts—now struggling in his bonds.
Pray for our friend, ye holy men of God !
Discourse and reason with him ; disenchant him
From the arch-necromancer's power, and save
The numbers who may fall by his example !

ARCHBISHOP.

Pardon, your grace ! the pagan to convert,
Or on the untaught mind of savage man
To write the sacred word of his redemption,
The church would spare no prayers, no time, no labour.
Not so for the foul heretic. *He* cannot
Plead ignorance, or involuntary error.
Nurtured in the bosom of our holy church,
With the full knowledge of his act and deed,
He gathers all his puny force to wound her ;
He raises up his sacrilegious hand
Against his spiritual mother. Shame ! oh, shame !
For him the church prays not, nor argues with ;
Her tenderness is quenched, her awful brow
For him is clothed in terror ; nought can stay
The impending thunderbolt of wrath, save only
Penitence sincere, and meek, and sorrowful ;
Mourning in ashes at her feet, and humbling
His proud heart to her chastening hand : this too
From his *own* deep conviction of his sin.
He only can unloose his soul from Satan,
He only can undo what he hath done,
And must not look for help, for there is none
On this side of the grave. Sire, we say not,
(For yet do we believe and hope that evil
Hath not acquired such strong dominion o'er him,)

We say not the Lord Cobham is that heretic.
 In heresy, as in all other sins,
 There are degrees of guilt, and God forbid
 He should so soon have reached the worst! Therefore,
 As to your grace he hath confessed the crime,
 In charity we look on such confession
 As the first fruit of his return to truth ;
 And, in accordance to the intent expressed
 Already to your highness, let him add
 In face of this assembly present here
 His solemn recantation, and the church
 Retakes him to her bosom as a son
 Saved from destruction, pardoned, and absolved.

HENRY.

Well hast thou spoken, venerable prelate !
 May we, and all here present, keep in mind
 Thy comforting assurance of the love
 Our holy mother bears to us, her children ;
 While trembling at her delegated power
 To bind and loose in this world and the next.

[To LORD COBHAM.]

Hear'st thou not her warning voice, my lord ?
 Awful that voice, yet full of tenderness :
 Oh, disregard it not ! The solemn words
 Big with thy fate are spoken ; with thee it rests
 To stamp them with the seal of life or death.

[Aside to him.]

Best, dearest friend—another moment gone
 And thou art lost ! no power on earth can save thee.
 Come, we will lead thee to the archbishop's feet—
 O God ! delay not ! (*Taking him by the arm.*)

(LORD COBHAM *gently removes his hand, kissing it respectfully ; then advances to the Archbishop.*)

My lord archbishop :

Whate'er the final judgment of the church,
 My grateful thanks are due unto your grace ;
 For I perceive, and cannot but acknowledge
 A merciful intent towards myself,
 Though mingled with the hope by my defection
 To crush, and utterly destroy for ever,
 The small firm band with whom the Word of God

Yet lives in pristine purity, amid
Extreme corruption ; and to whom 'tis given
To guard this surety of a world's redemption,
With mortal body and immortal soul ;
And finally, from whom it will again
Shine forth, the light and beacon of all nations.
Of this band I am one, and trust me, lords,
My apostasy would grieve—not injure it ;
My death would bring it strength and glory.

HENRY.

Forbear !

ARCHBISHOP.

We need no further evidence : he doth
Condemn himself.

BISHOP.

He doth. Why listen longer
To the *foolish prate** of this base heretic !

LORD COBHAM.

Heretic ! That word of slanderous reproach
Not only I deny, but I retort. Ye
Are the heretics ! 'Tis ye that have removed
From Christ's established church, and in its stead
Set up your temples of idolatry. In lieu
Of his meek robe of righteousness, ye clothe
In garments stiff with silver and with gold,
Sparkling with jewels from the bowels of the earth,
And paid for by indulgences of sin.
Away !—away, ye worse than pagan priests,
And let me pass upon my road to martyrdom.

HENRY.

All's lost !

ARCHBISHOP.

Sire, thou hast heard——

* The term bestowed on the simple and manly avowal of Lord Cobham.

HENRY.

We have—we have!

The Lord Powis there?

LORD POWIS.

May it please your grace?

HENRY.

Lord Cobham

Is thy prisoner. Convey him to the Tower.

LORD POWIS.

The Tower, your highness! where the governor—might I
Take licence to advise——

HENRY.

No, thou mayst not.

To the Tower is our command.

LORD POWIS (*to LORD COBHAM.*)

Yield thyself.

[*LORD COBHAM delivers his sword.*]

LORD COBHAM.

Farewell, my gracious, good, beloved sovereign!
My latest prayer shall be for thy conversion,
In which I hoped to have laboured; but it seems,
My death will better answer the great purpose
I have been called upon to forward. Fare-thee-well.
[*Exit with LORD POWIS.*]

HENRY.

Pardon, good lords, for we must seek awhile
Repose and privacy.

ARCHBISHOP.

Peace to your grace!



SCENE III.—*Within the walls of the Tower.*

Enter LORD POWIS, with LORD COBHAM, guarded; SIR CLEMENT FANSHAWE, and Guards, receiving them.

LORD POWIS.

By the king's order, to your charge, Sir Governor,
I here commit Lord Cobham, as impeached
Of heresy and blasphemy. Guard him well,
Sir knight. Your life for his, if he escape.

SIR CLEMENT.

My life for his! No need of threats, my lord.
I'm here in trust; and either I fulfil
My trust, or I resign it. Lord Cobham,
Thou art my prisoner: and may God forgive
Him who hath caused thee to become so!

LORD COBHAM.

Amen!

LORD POWIS.

I take my leave.

SIR CLEMENT.

As we would wish, my lord.

[Exit LORD POWIS, with guards.]

Oh, is it come to this! But I must check
All feeling, and all thought, save of my duty.
The warden there!

[Warden advances.]

Conduct this noble prisoner.

Place him in ward secure, and guard him well;
Treat him with all respect and courtesy;
Surround him with all comfort; any wish,
Communicate to me. God bless thee, Cobham!
Go,—speak not! I cannot bear it now—soon
I will see thee.

LORD COBHAM.

I thank thee, my good friend.

Remember me to *her*.

SIR CLEMENT.

I will—I will!

[*Exit LORD COBHAM, with Warden and Guards.*]

Oh, that this woe should come upon mine age!
When most I deemed myself secure from harm,
Anchoring in safety at the close of life
My shattered bark, from many a storm escaped,
In the sweet haven of domestic love!
It may not be: our trials on this earth cease
But with life——

(*Enter MATILDA.*)

Matilda!

MATILDA.

I have ventured forth,
Dear uncle—I could stay no longer. We're here
Alone, save yonder quiet sentinel, who paces
To and fro, regardless. Oh! tell me all!

SIR CLEMENT.

All!—why all is lost! He is my prisoner,
By order of the king; accused of heresy
And blasphemy; delivered to my charge
By his worst enemy. What more need we
To warn us of his coming fate?

MATILDA.

What more,

Indeed!

SIR CLEMENT.

He deems thee as his fellow-labourer
In this wild work, prepared to brave the worst.
But this blanched cheek and quivering lip betray thee.

MATILDA.

Oh, say not so, Sir Clement! These truly do
Betray the weakness of my woman's heart,
For there *is* weakness, but it lies upon
The surface only. Strength is at the core;
If not to do and dare, at least to endure
And suffer. Such is my portion.

SIR CLEMENT.

Poor girl!

'Tis but a sorry portion in exchange
For all the blessings that surrounded thee,
And all thy golden hopes in prospect.

MATILDA.

Uncle,

I could say much to soothe thee on this grief;
But that my words of comfort must be drawn
From sources yet unopened to thy knowledge.

SIR CLEMENT.

Niece, strive not to infect me with thy madness!
If thou, from *any* source, canst draw forth comfort,
God grant that source be ever open to thee!

Enter SIR EDWARD MORLAND.

SIR EDWARD.

With the king's signet I have passed your gates,
Sir Clement, and his royal message bear.

SIR CLEMENT.

Thou'rt welcome, worthy sir.

SIR EDWARD.

Lady, accept

My courteous greeting.

MATILDA.

Welcome, Sir Edward.

SIR EDWARD.

I trust I am the bearer of good news;
Not an intruder on your sacred sorrow.
His highness bids me say there still is *hope*,
If, by what mode thou mayst devise, good sir,
Aided by her so worthily beloved,
Thou canst prevail upon thy noble prisoner
To sign this paper. Scarcely need I say
The scroll in substance doth express the same

As he in words, with fearful obstinacy,
Refused to sanction. The dread council meets
To-morrow, at mid-day, to pass its sentence ;
His final and irrevocable doom.
The paper signed, the king himself presents ;
And all may yet be well.

SIR CLEMENT.

I thank the king,
My kind and gracious master : thee also,
Good Sir Edward. Where is the scroll ? I'll strive,
But much I fear——

SIR EDWARD.

Fear nothing : hope and zeal
And confidence, work better far than fear.
The scroll I give to this sweet mourner here ;
She must present it—on her knees present it—
With tears, with soft persuasion, tender prayers ;
Though unconvinced by argument, unmoved
By threats—these, these, will melt his stubborn heart,
And win him back again to life and love !

SIR CLEMENT.

Receive it, niece, and may it, in thy hands,
Act as a talisman upon our woes !

MATILDA.

Oh, in what light, Sir Edward, wilt thou view me ?
And how shall I appear to thee, my uncle ?
To the king ? when I declare, not e'en the hope
To save his life, most precious, could entice me
To present that paper to Lord Cobham. What !
A bribe to falsehood ! tempting to deny,
Like the reprov'd apostle ! Believe me, sirs,
Such offering from *my* hand, to him would prove
A pang sharper than death, and ineffectual
As its menace.

SIR EDWARD.

I stand confounded !

SIR CLEMENT.

Niece,

This is too much !

MATILDA.

My friends, ye both know well
How little, from my nature, I lay claim to
Masculine boldness, energy, or courage ;
Noted ever as a timid, fearful girl,
Whom her own shade would startle : ye know, too,
How fondly have my young affections twined
Around this noble being, my destined lord :
Judge then the force of this new-wakened power !
With all my fears, ye see me slighting death ;
With all my love, crushing that love's dear hopes
When just unfolding to maturity.
Ponder on this, and ye must e'en confess
A hand unseen doth guide us to accomplish
Our destined share of an almighty purpose.

SIR CLEMENT.

Behold the force of this delusion !

SIR EDWARD.

It is

Indeed most wonderful. We see at once
Nought can subdue it, to oppose is but
To strengthen and inflame. Yet, as being charged
With this commission, I must needs fulfil it ;
So, let us seek our poor deluded friend.
Lady, I will pray for thee—'tis all I can.

SIR CLEMENT.

God help thee, niece, pray I ! Anon, I'll speak with thee.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*The Chamber of MATILDA. She is discovered in prayer.*

Enter LAURA.

LAURA.

She prays for help, and Heaven hath heard her prayer.
My dear young lady!

MATILDA (*rising.*)

Laura! knowest thou
Whether Sir Edward hath departed hence?

LAURA.

Madam, he hath. But list to me, I bring
Good news: my brother bids me say, to-night,
Beneath this window, in a little skiff,
My father, at the hour of twelve, will wait;
And three nights following, at the self-same hour
He will be there, to take Lord Cobham, if
By any means we can transport him hither
Into this chamber.

MATILDA.

Laura, what blessed news!
Oh, God! I thank thee for this gleam of hope!
Then—from this window——

LAURA.

Safely may we manage
To let him down.

MATILDA.

Nor only him, my Laura ;
We must both go.

LAURA.

Ha !—be it so, dear lady,
To the end of the earth, and through all dangers,
Myself, and all of us, would follow thee :
Thy love unto thy lord becomes our pattern.

MATILDA.

Thanks, Laura. But how to convey him hither ?

LAURA.

Heaven

Doth prosper us in all : for at that hour
To night, 'twill be my brother's turn to watch
As sentry at his door ; upon the battlement,
Above us here, another pious friend
He thinks, will have his station. But ere night,
All will be planned.

MATILDA.

And if we cross the moat
In safety—then ?

LAURA.

My father says, already
There is a gathering of Lord Cobham's friends ;
With them he will commune of his escape ;
So that some few will be prepared to meet him
With means of flight.

MATILDA.

Your father—is he here ?

LAURA.

Yes, madam, waiting your reply.

MATILDA.

Let then

Your brother tell him not to fail at twelve ;
For we will work within, as he without,
To bring all things to bear. Go quick, dear girl,
For though the day be young, time is most precious.

LAURA.

God speed us !

[*Exit.*]

MATILDA.

For my loved uncle I fear nothing : sure I am
 The king, in secret joy at the escape,
 Will hold him free from all connivance, nor
 Will pursuit be pressed too closely. Oh, God !
 My heart o'erflows with thankfulness.

Enter SIR CLEMENT.

My uncle !

SIR CLEMENT.

The interview is over, niece ; and with it
 All hope is at an end : but this I scarce
 Need tell to thee.

MATILDA.

Scarcely, my dear uncle.

But let us drop all wrangling and debate,
 On what we see is now inevitable,
 'Tis ours to soothe his final days on earth,
 And soften, as we may, his rugged path,
 Replete with pain and horror. My all but parent,
 My blessed mother's dear-loved brother, who, with
 Such tender care, hath reared her orphan child,
 Complete thy work of love in this sad moment,
 And let no angry look, or word severe
 Embitter our last parting !

SIR CLEMENT (*embracing her tenderly.*)

My own dear girl !

Thou fair and gentle image of the sweet,
 Long lost companion of my early youth,
 Think not so harshly of me ! God forbid
 This breast, on which thine infant head hath lain,
 Should e'er prove cold to thee, happen what may !
 All this is thy misfortune, not thy fault ;
 And remedy, I now perceive, there's none.

MATILDA.

Then wilt thou not deny the only boon
 I have to ask ; the only consolation
 Left in our great misery. Oh, part us not
 For the short space that yet he may be spared !

SIR CLEMENT.

Already hath he prayed that boon. Come, child,
I'll lead thee to him.

MATILDA.

Thanks, dearest uncle—thanks !

SCENE II.—*The Prison-Chamber.*

LORD COBHAM *discovered writing. Throws down his pen.*

So !—these worldly matters soon will be arranged ;
And then, if time be granted to indite
A letter to my worthy friends and household,
'Tis all I wish for. Among the blessings
Of a kind Providence to man, I count
The disarming death, upon its *close* approach
Of its worst terrors : at a distance, while
There yet be hope, the horror of its aspect
Urges to intensity of action,
The first law of our nature : hope once fled,
The ghastly spectre takes a milder shape,
And gentler office ; it transforms the stripling
To a hero, nerves the soft-hearted woman
With man's superior courage ; and blunts the edge
Of terror e'en to the penitent condemned.
Then how much more will the stern shadow change
To him who meets him in a righteous cause,
And with a Christian's faith and resignation !
Welcome, dark angel ! now, or at any time
It pleaseth God to send thee, thou art welcome !
Some one approaches.

Enter SIR CLEMENT and MATILDA.

SIR CLEMENT.

My lord, I bring thee
The only consolation in my power.

LORD COBHAM (*fondly embracing her.*)

Matilda !

SIR CLEMENT.

Poor sufferers! they rive my heart. [*Exit.*]

LORD COBHAM.

Matilda! next unto His grace and love,
The fairest and the best of all God's gifts!
Our hopes of earthly bliss——

MATILDA.

Are not yet blighted.
I bring thee happy news, my dearest lord;
Thine escape is planned——

LORD COBHAM.

How?

MATILDA.

This very night,
At twelve, from hence conveyed unto my chamber;
There, from the window lowered, a skiff receives thee,
And friends will wait thee near the other side,
With ready means of transport.

LORD COBHAM.

Thy will, O Lord,
In this be done, as in all else! But *thou*?

MATILDA.

With thee my lot is cast, if thou'lt permit—
Deny me not, I pray thee!

LORD COBHAM.

Oh, woman!
How tender and enduring is the love
Implanted in thy nature! Wilt thou, then, truly
Quit the safe shelter of thy happy home;
Its friends, its luxuries, to wander forth
With one condemned? To share in all his toils;
To suffer his privations, and to face
Perchance even death itself?

MATILDA.

Oh, do not strive
To fright me from thee !—it is all in vain.
I am thy second self, thy fate is mine ;
God hath united us ; and none, save He,
May part us.

LORD COBHAM.

Be it so, Matilda ! Oh, thou—
In whose divine and perfect essence love
Holds such large share, that thou didst freely give
Part of thine own all-glorious Being to sustain
Our ills, and expiate our sins—benignly look
On this, our bond of mortal love ! Sanctify
The holy tie that binds us to each other
And to Thee, that firmly, thus united,
We may pursue the path Thou hast appointed,
Fulfilling thy behest in life or death !

MATILDA.

Amen ! And now, dear lord, dost think, with me,
No danger, from suspicion, will beset
My good, kind uncle ?

LORD COBHAM.

That we must prevent
As far as may be. I will leave in writing
Assurance of the truth : do thou the same.
The king, from blame, will gladly hold him free.
So, sit we down, my love, and let us con
With care the task before us : whom to trust,
And whither to direct our wandering steps,
Tracked by the avengers of the wrathful church.
Revenge and wrath ! What ministers to Him,
Whose precept and example taught us all
To forgive in gentleness and charity,
As we hereafter hope to be forgiven !

SCENE III.—A Forest.

Enter GAINSBOROUGH, CARLTON, *and Others.*

GAINSBOROUGH.

'Tis somewhat late—our scouts do not return.

CARLTON.

How anxious is this moment ! May Heaven watch
Over their safety. Ha ! here comes one——

Enter SERVANT.

SERVANT.

Sirs,
They have arrived, all safe !

ALL.

Thank God! Thank God!

GAINSBOROUGH.

The morning hath scarce broke; they will have time
To distance all pursuit.

CARLTON.

Hark ! they are near.

Enter LORD COBHAM, MATILDA, *and* LAURA.

ALL (*pressing round them.*)

Welcome ! Welcome !

LORD COBHAM.

My dear and faithful friends!
Scarce can I speak to ye from strong emotion.
Ye have, indeed, acted the good part, and proved
Your sterling value in the hour of need.

GAINSBOROUGH.

I think I speak for all, when I aver
There is not one among us who would not
Most cheerfully lay down his life for thine.

LORD COBHAM.

Thanks, my preservers, thanks!

CARLTON.

We must not lose

One single moment ; not even to rest
This delicate lady here.

MATILDA.

True, worthy sir :

We've suffered slight fatigue, and need no rest.

GAINSBOROUGH.

The horses wait a few steps farther on.
Whither doth my lord direct his course ?

LORD COBHAM.

To Wales : all things considered, 'tis the best
And safest. Come, my dear, heroic love !
Our kind friends will escort us to the place
Of starting, and there take we of them our leave,
With grateful thanks, and mutual prayers and blessings.

SCENE IV.—*An Apartment in the Palace.*

The KING and SIR EDWARD MORLAND.

HENRY.

Now, good Sir Edward, tell us all. Yesterday,
Our absence being enforced, we could not grant
An audience, most impatient though we were
For the result of thy good mission.

SIR EDWARD.

Sire,

I grieve to say that the result is nought.

HENRY.

We deemed as much.

SIR EDWARD.

No reasonings, no prayers,
Could move him. He was truly the deaf adder
Whom none could charm, charm they e'er so wisely.

HENRY.

And his Matilda? Her, too, could he resist?
That lovely girl—and on the eve of bridal!

SIR EDWARD.

I think her, too, he would have found the power,
With all her pleading beauty, to resist,
Had she essayed the task.

HENRY.

How? had she essayed?

SIR EDWARD.

Your highness scarce will credit her refusal.
She said that not the hope to save his life,
Could lure her to present him with that paper.

HENRY.

Can this be true? Then all, indeed, is over!
What source supplies the high enthusiasm,
That to a timid, loving girl imparts
Such energy of purpose? It is fearful,
And wonderful to contemplate.

SIR EDWARD.

My liege,
The source is but a terrible delusion.

HENRY.

Whate'er it be, 'tis not of earth; but whether
Of heaven or hell—there is the doubt, and who
Can solve it?

SIR EDWARD.

Oh, let no doubt creep in upon
The ruling mind of England! We have one standard

And only one, by which to fix our faith.
It is an awful subject, and is best
Left without question in the hands of those,
Who guide our spiritual welfare.

HENRY.

'Tis best.

The council's hour is near, and we have never,
Prepared to meet it with a heart so heavy.

Enter ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT.

May it please your grace, Sir Clement Fanshawe,
Governor of the Tower, doth pray admittance.

HENRY.

Ha! admit him.

[*Exit ATTENDANT.*

Some happy change, perchance!

Enter SIR CLEMENT.

SIR CLEMENT (*throwing himself on his knees.*)

My liege! my liege! low at thy feet behold
Thine ancient servant, bending 'neath a weight
Of misery and dishonour—ay, dishonour!
Though undeserved indeed—yet foul suspicion
Will brand my brow with shame. Sire, I've failed in,
But not betrayed my trust. My prisoner—

HENRY.

Speak!

SIR CLEMENT.

Lord Cobham hath escaped.

HENRY (*aside.*)

Thank God! Rise up,

Our good Sir Clement!

[*Raises him.*

And be assured, on thee

Suspicion cannot rest—therefore, no blame.

How hath this chanced?

SIR CLEMENT.

My liege, I scarce can tell :
The fact is all I know ; I waited not
To dive into the means, but instant came
To acquaint your grace. The plot no doubt was laid
By my own niece, for she hath fled with him.

HENRY.

I'faith, we're well o'erreached, Sir Clement : women
Have oft keen wits, and power of simulation
Most profound.

SIR CLEMENT.

These two letters, sire, were left ;
Would your grace deign to read them.

HENRY.

Give them. Now
Sir Clement, hie thee to thy fortress back.
Push not inquiry—thy duty is performed ;
These letters will no doubt exculpate thee
To other eyes than ours : fear nought. Adieu.

SIR CLEMENT.

Gracious sovereign ! my heart is all too full
For words. (*Kneels, and kisses his hand.*)

HENRY.

Give him thine escort, Morland.

THE KING (*alone.*)

Just as I ventured to predict, yet scarcely
Dared to hope. That noble girl ! Now, Cobham,
Thou'rt safe, if hast the worldly wit to keep so.
To foreign lands, no doubt, they will find means
Of transport, and I shall have but to deplore
His absence—and that, perhaps, for no long while—
And not his cruel and untimely death.
I meet the council with a mourning brow,
But with a gladdened heart. Now for these letters.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*Secluded Mountain Scenery in Wales. A Cottage in the distance, from which MATILDA (LADY COBHAM) advances to meet LORD COBHAM returning from his field-labours. Both arrayed as Peasants.*

MATILDA.

Look, dearest ! what a fair winter nosegay
Yon sheltered nook hath cherished : forth I come,
Rich as a Flora, with my gift to meet thee.

LORD COBHAM (*embracing her.*)

And always welcome to my sight, sweet wife,
As was the genial warmth unto these flowers.

MATILDA.

Thou look'st aweary, love : come, rest awhile ;
Our table's spread, our hearth is bright and cheerful

LORD COBHAM.

My blessed one ! thy happy smile doth make
This wilderness a Paradise ; labour
A sport ; frugality luxurious.
Enchantress ! tinting with a roseate hue
The dark and threatening clouds of life ; wreathing
With fresh and lovely flowers the blighted tree ;
Transmuting into links of gold the chain,
Whose rust would eat into the soul. Matilda !
Another trial is approaching thee.

MATILDA.

Speak out !
So it be but with thee, by thy loved side,
I will not shrink.

LORD COBHAM.

There lies its bitterness,
For we must part awhile.

MATILDA.

Oh, aught but that !

LORD COBHAM.

Letters I have received from London, where
Our brethren pray my presence for a time ;
For some believe me dead, and are disheartened ;
Some fear I have abandoned them for aye,
In foreign lands to dwell ; and all desire
To see and hear their leader once again.
On matters of much import, too, they call
Upon my aid and counsel, not content
With the advice, and scarce obedient to
The rule of others.

MATILDA.

Must it indeed be so ?

LORD COBHAM.

Thou tremblest, and art pale. There's nought to fear.

MATILDA.

Oh ! I must ever fear ! though slight the risk,
Though short thine absence, yet—

LORD COBHAM.

I promise thee,
That the revolving moon shall see me here.
On the fourth Sunday from this day, my love.
We pray together.

MATILDA.

And yet—oh, wherefore doth
The expression of thine intent strike thus
A chill foreboding on my heart ?

LORD COBHAM.

Away
With it, my own Matilda ! think of nought
But of our happy meeting ; the bitterness
Of absence sweetening even *our* affection.
And let us not forget, my wife, amid
The peaceful blessings of our present lot,

That endurance, not enjoyment, is our share ;
There is no resting-place for us on earth,
And we must be "about our Father's business."

MATILDA.

O pardon me, my best beloved ! I bow
Corrected and submissive.

LORD COBHAM.

My gentle wife !
Dear in thy very weakness ! be it mine
To strengthen and support thee in our task.

MATILDA.

When goest thou hence ?

LORD COBHAM.

To-morrow's early dawn
Must see me on my way.

MATILDA.

Alone ? Disguised ?

LORD COBHAM.

Disguised, I join me with a troop of travellers,
Of whom they send me information.

MATILDA.

Come, then,
I must arouse me, dearest, and prepare
With Laura, all things for thy comfort, praying
For thy speedy, safe return.

LORD COBHAM.

Nay, love, rather
Pray for a blessing on the mission's self.
I leave thee with thy faithful handmaid, Laura,
And trust thee to her brother's watchful care.
Redouble all thy vigilance, Matilda,
Pending this interval of absence ; the more,
As now we know for certain the Lord Powis,
Our unrelenting enemy, is placed
In power here, as Warden of the Marches.

SCENE II.—*The King's Residence at Eltham.*

KING HENRY and SIR EDWARD MORLAND.

HENRY.

Scarcely can we believe this frightful rumour.

SIR EDWARD.

My liege, I fear it hath some ground in truth.
That the Lord Cobham hath been seen in London,
Within these few days past, there is no doubt;
And that his presence hath excited much
Of strange commotion in the multitude,
(Far more, perhaps, than he foresaw or wished,)
Can scarcely be denied. But here I pause.
I yield no credit to designs of violence,
Whether of sacrilege towards the church,
Or of disloyalty towards his sovereign.

HENRY.

Whence, then, his forbidden presence here? Wherefore
This "strange commotion in the multitude,"
Excited by that presence? Morland, be assured,
Although concealed and absent, he hath been
The main-spring of the sad and awful change
Now working in the bosom of my people.
Talk to a right true fanatic of prudence,
Gratitude, care for himself, or those
Depending on him—talk to the winds and waves!
His senses warped, his nature changed, he hath
Become a creature of another mould.

SIR EDWARD.

Alas! it doth indeed appear so.

HENRY.

Nought,
We tell thee, will save Cobham from destruction.
He was in safety, with his young, loved wife,

Time might work wonders, and full well he knew
Our power and friendship were the same. But, no,
Like to the silly moth, he still returns
To hover round the flame which will destroy him.

SIR EDWARD.

Now all the saints forfend !

HENRY.

Who cometh here ?

Enter ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT.

Sire, the Bishop of London——

HENRY.

Let him approach.

[Exit ATTENDANT.]

That angry bishop ! Be ye sure, he brings
Cobham's death warrant.

Enter the BISHOP.

BISHOP.

Bad news I bear, my liege.

HENRY.

Speak out, my lord.

BISHOP.

Lord Cobham hath returned.

The capital is in disturbance, and
This very night, we learn, a vast assemblage
Of his armed followers, in St. Giles's fields,
Will meet to do his bidding. I have come,
At the Archbishop's behest, almost alone,
Sparing nor whip nor spur, to warn your grace.

HENRY.

We thank thee, reverend lord. Sir Edward, give
Our order for departure hence, with all
Our household troops on duty here. Then hie thee

To London with good speed, and there have ready
Such force as can be hastily collected,
For the attack of these rebellious heretica.

[Exit SIR EDWARD.]

BISHOP.

The Lord Cobham——

HENRY.

My good bishop, let us take
Refreshment ere we start ; your reverence
Must surely need it.

SCENE III.—*London: An Apartment in a Private Residence.*

LORD COBHAM, GAINSBOROUGH, CARLTON, and others.

LORD COBHAM.

Truly, indeed, do I rejoice, my friends,
To find the good seed yielding, thus profusely,
A rich and glorious harvest ! Praise be to Him,
To whom all praise is due !

ALL.

Praise be to Him !

LORD COBHAM.

This eve, my brethren, then, it is agreed,
We meet our converts in St. Giles's fields ?

GAINSBOROUGH.

Hundreds await the time with eagerness.

LORD COBHAM.

I trust they're warned to assemble peaceably ;
No arms, no clamour ; subdued and meek in spirit,
As best beseemeth those who come to hear
The Word of God, according to their conscience,
Preached and expounded.

CARLTON.

All are so prepared.

LORD COBHAM.

And that they will return them to their homes
As sober citizens, and loyal subjects;
Cherishing in their hearts the gracious Word,
With goodwill towards all men.

CARLTON.

Thus do they promise.

LORD COBHAM.

It is well. Such comfort and instruction as
Can be afforded them through my poor means,
My spirit will, indeed, rejoice to give.
May He, who touched Isaiah's lips with fire,
Prompt and inspire me; that my words may fall
Gently as balm into the wounded heart,
As drops of cordial to the weak and faint,
And as the refreshing dew of Heaven on all!

SCENE IV.—*Evening: a lighted Apartment in the Palace.*

The ARCHBISHOP, BISHOP OF LONDON, and other Prelates.

SIR EDWARD MORLAND, *Lords and Gentlemen.*

ARCHBISHOP.

A special Providence hath interposed
To save this favoured people from the workings
Of heresy's fell spirit. At break of day,
No glimmering of this foul conspiracy,
Fearful as foul, had struck our sight, however
Keen and watchful; ere night, all is laid open,
Crushed and punished: angels and saints be praised!

BISHOP.

As on this day,* the appointed star which led
The wise men in the east, stay'd in its course,
And shone with its concentred rays upon

* Epiphany.

E

The spot where Mary's sacred infant slept ;
 So, by a guide less obvious, yet as sure,
 Have we been led ; but not indeed to worship
 With peaceful gifts of frankincense and myrrh.
 A harsher task is ours : a sacrifice
 To cleanse our people from their stain of sin,
 Are we, alas ! ordained to offer up.
 May we fulfil it with the faith and zeal,
 Which those first Christian worshippers inspired.

A PRELATE.

Amen, my lord ! The heretic Cobham, now,
 If once again committed to the Tower,
 Will find no favouring governor, with a niece
 Fair and seducing, to assist his flight.

SIR EDWARD.

He never found a favouring governor :
 Sir Clement was a knight too good and loyal
 To favour the escape of any prisoner
 Whose charge he had accepted.

BISHOP.

Be it so :

'Tis charitable to suppose it thus.
Our duty now it doth become to guard
 This lawless heretic, rebel alike
 To church and state, whose heart is turned to stone,
 As was the Egyptian king's of old, unsoftened
 By mercy's self to gratitude—but hark !

SIR EDWARD.

The tramp of horses.

ARCHBISHOP.

'Tis the king. I trust
 He comes triumphant—but I see no prisoner.

(Enter KING with military attendance.)

The church's blessing rests on her defender.

HENRY *(throwing down his casque.)*

Give me to drink. Off with these trappings—there!

ARCHBISHOP.

Thou seem'st aweary, sire.

HENRY.

Aweary? ay—
With butchering defenceless men like sheep.
Who of ye talked to us of an armed throng
Bent upon confusion, pillage, massacre,
Enforcing their cursed heresies by fire
And sword? We charged among them, and their blood
Had flowed in torrents, ere we found, in lieu
Of an attack on armed and dangerous rebels,
That we were hewing at some hundred dozen
Of silly psalm-singers, powerless for defence,
Too terrified almost for flight itself.
We stayed the slaughter when we found it thus,
And drew our blood-hounds off.

BISHOP.

And the Lord Cobham?

HENRY.

We saw him at the close: he stood before us
Impassive as it seemed to all around,
With folded arms, and calm condemning eye.
We strove to reach him—'twas in vain—his followers
Formed round him as a living wall; and favoured
By darkness, by confusion, by our order
To yield them quarter, and to stay pursuit—
He escaped.

SEVERAL VOICES.

Escaped!

ARCHBISHOP.

Give me leave to ask,
Had the king reached him, what would he have done?

HENRY.

We do believe, my lord archbishop, that,
Inflamed with anger as we were, and him
Regarding as an ingrate, as a rebel,
And the sole cause of all this needless bloodshed,
We should have plunged our sword into his heart,
Unarmed and unresisting as he stood.

Thank Heaven, that such temptation to offend
 Against the laws of knighthood was removed!
 That our good sword is guiltless of the blood
 Of him, whom once we so much loved and honoured!

ARCHBISHOP.

A stronger and a holier tie than that
 Of knighthood, my lord king, binds us to quell
 The enemies of our religion. Aliens
 To the law of God, wherefore dare they look
 For aid or favour from the law of man?
 'Twas not the voice of earthly passion prompted
 Thine impulse to destroy the recreant—no
 It was an inspiration from above:
 I pray thee, disregard it not! pursue
 With ceaseless vigour this most dangerous man;
 Thy temporal and eternal weal demand
 His death without reprieve.

HENRY.

It may be so.

BISHOP.

Hold we no clue for his pursuit?

HENRY.

To Wales;
 We have strong reason to believe his flight
 Sooner or later will tend thither; therefore
 To the Lord Powis, warden of the marches,
 Orders shall be sent this instant.

BISHOP.

And if
 The recreant be secured—what then, my liege?

HENRY.

We give him up to ye. Speak to us no more—
 Never let our ears again be wounded
 Even by his name! Deal with him as ye list:
 One stipulation only.

ARCHBISHOP.

Speak it, sire.

HENRY.

If he recant, even at the eleventh hour,
Spare him!

ARCHBISHOP.

His life we will; but from this kingdom—

HENRY.

Let him be banished. Morland, thine arm. To each
And all, good-night.

ALL.

May God preserve your highness!

[*Exeunt* HENRY and SIR EDWARD MORLAND.]

BISHOP.

'Tis very well: the monarch's eyes at length
Are opened to the crime and criminal.

A LORD.

Rejoice!
The favourite hath fallen; and from what height,
Into what depth!—above, below, we gaze
Astounded! Great indeed hath been this fall!

A PRELATE.

If once, my good lord bishop, we secure
The dire apostate, we can do no less
Than give him foretaste of the eternal flame,
To which he's doomed for ever.

BISHOP.

Ay, to the stake!
Heresy, like witchcraft, must be burnt to ashes.
So foul a stain, no element, save fire,
Can purge away from the polluted land.

ARCHBISHOP.

My brethren, and my children, 'tis indeed
A fearful lesson we are taught this day!
Lay it to your hearts; and in confession,
In fasting, prayer, and earnest meditation,
Retreat for safety from that Evil One,
Who haunts the earth in every guise of sin,
Seeking, assiduous, whom he may devour.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*Wales.*—*Near the retreat of the COBHAMS.**Enter stealthily LORD POWIS and an ESQUIRE.*

ESQUIRE.

Yonder, my lord, within that sheltered nook,
 Where a light wreath of smoke is rising, lies
 The cottage I suspect. Peering about
 I chanced to spy a girl, whose form recalled
 That of the young maid, wont often to attend
 On old Sir Clement's niece; I hid myself,
 While she approached so near as to remove
 All doubt.

LORD POWIS.

We must not lose the clue. Hast posted
 Our men about?

ESQUIRE.

All on the watch lie close,
 Awaiting but the signal.

LORD POWIS.

Hush! look there!

Two females are emerging from that nook,
 And one—'tis she! I cannot be deceived.
 Go, steal away, while I ensconce myself
 Behind this huge old oak.

[*Exit ESQUIRE.*
Matilda, now

My slighted passion is indeed revenged!

[*Conceals himself.*]*Enter LADY COBHAM and LAURA.*

LAURA.

Here, my sweet lady, is thy favourite seat.

MATILDA.

Favourite, indeed! how often have we sat,
My dear loved lord and I, beneath its shade;
How often, in the summer heats, here brought
Our frugal meal; but now 'tis drear and damp:
We court the mid-day sun. Look round, my Laura,
Seest thou no trace of him, whom now—oh, joy!
Hourly we may expect? I will not look,
For I transform each thing unto my wish
And fancy him in a thousand shapes.

LAURA.

All's still—

And I see no one but my brother yonder,
Hard at his work on this chill day. I too
Must now return to mine, so fare thee well
Dear lady, for a space. [*Exit* LAURA.]

MATILDA.

Which in my heart
Beats highest, hope or fear? 'twere hard to say
Which reason most would cherish, compassed round
With shadowy and uncertain forms of danger.
Were *he* but here, although with footsteps tracked
By the fell ministers of death, I feel—
(Oh foolish fancy!) he were safe indeed
Within my weak, yet sheltering arms. The peasant
Who bore his writing, passed easy and secure.

[*Draws a paper from her bosom.* LORD POWIS advances.]

Oh, let me kiss these dear lines once again!
Traced by his hand—scrawled, I should rather say,
In such great haste, I scarcely yet am sure
Of their full purport.

LORD POWIS.

Matilda!—hush! silence!
Shriek not for thy life! I am here thy friend.

MATILDA (*gasping with horror.*)

Friend! Lord Powis! Oh, God—oh, God!

LORD POWIS.

I pray thee,
Master thine emotion for the sake of him,
Thou lov'st so well, and for thine own, and mine,
Who risk my life to warn and save thee!

MATILDA.

Speak on:

I'm calm, my lord.

LORD POWIS.

Hath news from London reached thee?

MATILDA.

No news.

LORD POWIS.

Then, list! An armed assembly summoned,
By the Lord Cobham in the open fields, hath been
Attacked by the king himself, and put to rout
With frightful carnage: thy lord escaped, and hither
No doubt directs his course. Madam, behold!
[*Draws out a paper, and unfolds it before her.*]
The mandate, this, to search for, and to seize
Thy lord, thyself, and servants: mark it well,
Here is the royal signature; appended
Here, the seal of office.

MATILDA.

I see it all.

LORD POWIS.

And I have sought thee out, Matilda, not
To execute this dread decree. Oh, no!
But to secure thy safety, and the flight
Of thy loved lord. Upon this western coast
A vessel waits, which shall convey him hence;
Whilst thou, dear lady, for a time must seek
Shelter within my castle-walls, until
Occasion may be found to speed thee on.

MATILDA.

Lord Powis, if thou dost but mean us fair,
And art indeed sincere, my gratitude

May scarce find words; yet deem me not ungracious
If I ask, wherefore, in that same good vessel,
I may not join my husband? Thou art here
All-powerful, and 'tis as easy to secure
Mine, as my lord's escape. Do this, I pray,
And I will thank and bless thee!

LORD POWIS.

It cannot be:

The attempt to do too much would ruin all.
I'm here in power, 'tis true; but there are eyes
That watch maliciously, and evil tongues
Too ready to report. Matilda, no:
For a season thou must come with me, and trust
Thy safety to mine honour.

MATILDA (*aside.*)

Never! never!

He doth betray his sovereign's trust to save
His mortal foe!—that, which my uncle would not,
Even for us! I dread some lurking treachery—
Yet will I strive to melt him—Heaven speed me!

LORD POWIS.

And thou canst hesitate! What! when a life
So dear to thee, hangs trembling in the balance!
I did not look for this.

MATILDA (*throwing herself on her knees.*)

My lord! my lord!

We're in thy power—oh! be a generous foe!
And prove that the affection once professed
For her, who kneeling, now implores thy pity,
Was not unworthy of thyself or her!
Throw off the selfishness of passion, whether
Of love or hate! all that is good and noble
In thy nature, call forth now!—forgive! forget!
And if to *one*—oh, freely yield to *both*,
The glorious gifts of freedom and of life!

LORD POWIS (*raising her.*)

Beautiful suppliant, arise! why kneel to him,
Whom, well thou know'st, thy slightest word or look

Are ample to command, even unto death?
Be it as thou wilt; if not beyond the verge
Of what is possible, it shall be done.
Meanwhile, away from hence I must convey thee!
Dangers are pressing round, and the same clue
By which I traced thee, will lead others hither,
Intent to gain the prize that bigotry
Hath set upon this lovely head.

MATILDA.

Oh, no—no!
Each moment do I look for my dear lord;
Let me await him here, and then together
Will we confide ourselves unto thy mercy.

LORD POWIS.

It may not be. Snares are around his steps;
Which, to avoid, demands both time and caution;
Delay will surely rise, and that delay
To thee may prove most fatal.

MATILDA.

I will leave
My cottage, then, and hide me in some cave.

LORD POWIS.

Thou dost distrust me? Ha!

MATILDA.

God knows how much
I strive to yield thee my whole confidence!

LORD POWIS.

And striv'st in vain—is it not so, Matilda?
Then throw I off the mask at once. Choose, thou,
Between thy husband's death, and my protection.
Resign thyself to me, and he is safe;
Refuse, he dies—dies, too, amid such torments
As our kind priests prepare—as yet unheard of.
His fate is in thy hands.

MATILDA.

Thank Heaven, it is so!
My choice is made.

LORD POWIS.

He dies ?

MATILDA.

He dies !

LORD POWIS.

Matilda !

MATILDA.

Avaunt, thou recreant knight ! Base traitor, hence !
Who dar'st to think that Cobham's wife would purchase
Her husband's life at price of her dishonour.

LORD POWIS.

Forget not thou art wholly in my power.

MATILDA.

Thou hast no power, save what the will of God
Permits ; and from all shame dishonest, He
Will guard and save me. Neither do I fear
Death for my husband or myself, whene'er
Our Father's voice may call us hence : therefore,
Oh, son of darkness, learn thou hast no power !

LORD POWIS.

Learn thou a different lesson, my fair fanatic !

[*Winds gently a single note on his horn.*

LORD COBHAM *appears in the background.*

Enter two armed men.

Conduct this lady to my castle quickly,
Carefully, and with all courtesy. Away !

LORD COBHAM (*advancing.*)

Ruffians, desist ! What means all this ?

MATILDA (*rushing into his arms.*)

My husband !

LORD POWIS.

Ha ! my Lord Cobham here ! Thou art my prisoner.

LORD COBHAM.

Show me thy warrant.

LORD POWIS.

Here! [*Gives the paper.*]

LORD COBHAM (*examines it.*)

We are thy prisoners.
But mark, my lord, thou'rt by this to send us,
Whether together ta'en, or separate,
Direct to the Tower of London. Thy castle,
Whither thou wouldst have borne my wife, this lady,
Lies afar off, and in direction wholly
Opposite. Lord Powis, thou'rt a man, with whom
No one ought privately to deal, and therefore,
I, by thy leave, will call more witnesses—
Will rouse thine ambush; which hath not 'scaped me,
Though I have it. [*Winds his horn.*]

LORD POWIS.

Curse ye!

LORD COBHAM.

The little valley
Starts into life! Behold! Shrink not, my love!

Enter, from different directions, a band of armed men.

LORD POWIS.

Seize the traitor!

LORD COBHAM.

My lord, we are thy prisoners,
According to this warrant, to be hence
Removed together, and without delay,
To London. Mark this, all who are present here!
To the Tower, together, and without delay.
Take back your warrant, my lord warden,
And at your peril disobey one tittle!
Receive my sword.

LORD POWIS.

Their servants?

ESQUIRE.

Are secured.

LORD POWIS.

To London, then, forthwith ! Heretics abhorred !
Go, where the dungeon and the stake await ye !

SCENE II.—*London : Governor's Apartment in the Tower.*

The NEW GOVERNOR and SIR EDWARD MORLAND.

GOVERNOR.

Welcome, Sir Edward ! How hast found my prisoner ?

SIR EDWARD.

Not only calm, but cheerful ; conversing with,
Comforting, and exhorting all around him.
'Tis passing strange, and wondrous to behold
The work of faith upon a mind like his.

GOVERNOR.

The work of Satan counterfeiting faith ;
This thou wouldst say.

SIR EDWARD.

Whate'er it be, 'tis perfect.
Like Socrates of old, awaiting death,
He sits amid his friends, and soothes their grief.

GOVERNOR.

To a heathen thou art welcome to compare him.

SIR EDWARD.

Reclining at his feet, his fair young wife,
All pale and still, with eyes upturned to his,
Seems as absorbed in his superior nature.
While near them, leaning on his staff, with locks
Of silver shadowing o'er his care-worn brow,
Sits good Sir Clement. Ever on my mind
Will rest the picture of that group.

GOVERNOR.

Fie, fie,

Sir Edward!—let not pity master thus
Thy just abhorrence of the awful crime
For which Lord Cobham suffers. The king, methinks,
Hath favoured him too much in the permission
To receive his friends, who all may have access
(Except his blinded followers), in the frail hope,
That prayer and argument may overcome,
At the last hour, his fearful obstinacy.

SIR EDWARD.

I think with thee, the hope is frail indeed.
That sad last hour approaches near, Sir Governor?

GOVERNOR.

The evening twilight of this gloomy morn,
Will be prolonged and brightened by the flames
Kindled to consume this prince of heretics.

SIR EDWARD.

For the honour of our priesthood, I do hope
The rumour that is bruited about
Of adding torments even to the flames,
Is false and idle gossip.

GOVERNOR.

I cannot tell,

But I have heard that the ample pyre must fall
In burning ashes, ere the deed begin.

SIR EDWARD.

Oh, shame! shame!

GOVERNOR.

My good Sir Edward, it behoves

To impress the multitude with awe and terror.
Think but if this crime increase, how many souls
The recreant will have helped into perdition!
What is an hour of final suffering here
For him, the guilty, if by its dread horrors
We snatch but one from misery eternal?

SIR EDWARD (*aside*.)

I must be cautious here. I own myself
Warned and corrected, good Sir Governor.

GOVERNOR.

'Tis well.

SIR EDWARD.

For a few hours I take my leave.

GOVERNOR.

Adieu!

SCENE III.—*The Prison Chamber.**Enter LORD COBHAM from an interior apartment.*

LORD COBHAM.

Once more I am alone. My poor Matilda,
Worn out with grief, and weariness, and watching,
Hath wept herself to sleep: may Heaven prolong
That kindly rest—the awaking will be fearful!
All, at my earnest prayer, have hence withdrawn,
And I, in stillness and in solitude,
Am here before thee, O my God! thou readest
My inmost thoughts: if on them lie a stain
Of spiritual pride, or scornful obstinacy,
Or an undue desire of worldly fame,
Or unforgiving hatred, or contempt,
Remove such stain by thine all cleansing grace,
And purify the unworthy sacrifice!
Upon my glorious prototype may still
My soul gaze steadfastly, and in the view
Of His great martyrdom, forget my own!
—Still interrupted.

Enter the GOVERNOR.

GOVERNOR.

By thy leave, my lord.

LORD COBHAM.

Sir Governor?

GOVERNOR.

I come the unwilling bearer
Of melancholy tidings to your lordship.

LORD COBHAM.

The tidings of approaching death?

GOVERNOR.

Just so.

This eve, my lord, at sunset, be prepared:
Unless the prayers of pious men prevail
To bring to thee conviction of thine errors.
To the last moment is the fount of mercy
Open unto thee.

LORD COBHAM.

Sir, all pious men I thank,
Who offer up their prayers sincere for me.
The fount of human mercy, open yet,
I dare not taste; 'tis, to my lips, impregned
With death eternal; therefore, sir, at sunset
Thoul't find me here, prepared.

GOVERNOR.

At thy good pleasure.

LORD COBHAM.

My wife—may I ask?

GOVERNOR.

Thy death doth set her free;
'Thy servants also.

LORD COBHAM.

It is very well.
I thank thee, sir.

GOVERNOR.

Farewell to thee, my lord.

[*Exit.*]

LORD COBHAM.

This is as it should be. On *my* head alone
Falls the full weight of hatred and revenge.
My wife is spared—no violence will force
Her gentle spirit hence: Father, I thank thee!

Enter GUARD.

GUARD.

A reverend friar, my lord, doth beg for entrance.

LORD COBHAM.

Admit him.

[Exit GUARD*(Enter* FATHER ANSELM.)

Ha! Father Anselm! many a year
Hath passed since we have met. This is most kind.

FATHER ANSELM.

Oh, my dear lord! I could not hear of all
The awful dangers that encompass thee,
And not take up my pilgrim's staff once more,
And quit my solitude, to seek thee here.

LORD COBHAM.

Good Anselm! by such devoted charity
I recognise my venerable friend;
And know the weakness of his age would plead
In vain, against all weariness and danger,
When good is to be done.

FATHER ANSELM.

May the saints grant
That good indeed be done! that not in vain
I come to thee, my friend! Thou knowest well
Though long a convert to monastic life,
No narrow bigotry pervades my thoughts.
Thou art accused of heresy—condemned
To death—this very eve, 'tis said, thou diest.

LORD COBHAM.

'Tis true.

FATHER ANSELM.

Thy cheerful look, and easy mien
Declare a mind at rest.

LORD COBHAM.

Had I not to part
From those I dearly love, not at rest only,
But filled with perfect gladness would I meet
My glorious fate.

FATHER ANSELM.

Such is indeed the sign
Of deep, sincere, unchangeable conviction!

LORD COBHAM.

Therefore, good father, thou mayst well perceive
That though the boon of life be mine to claim
Up to the last moment, there can be no hope.

FATHER ANSELM.

Life is a sacred gift, my lord, and ought not
To be lightly staked, or carelessly thrown by,
As in bravado both of God and man.

LORD COBHAM.

Father, I prize the gift at its full value;
Few have enjoyed it more, and few, I trust,
With hearts more thankful; and to preserve it
I have done all that conscience will allow.

FATHER ANSELM.

There is the rub: hast thou examined well
Whether thy conscience have not been misled?

LORD COBHAM.

With all the faculties my God hath given
I've laboured in this scrutiny. With thee
Conversing, reasoning here, as man to man,
We will not enter on those doubtful points
Of doctrine, argued in the schools with more
Of subtle sophistry than sense or judgment;
Null as regards the great and solid truths
Which form the basis of the Christian creed,

While tending to degrade and cramp our intellect,
And rouse the rancorous passions of our nature :
On these we touch not, and in declining them
I acknowledge thee, as well as feel myself
In premature advancement of this age.

FATHER ANSELM.

My lord, upon such points we are agreed.

LORD COBHAM.

What then remains? those clouds of mist roll'd off,
The truth, like all great truths, simple and clear,
Flashes conviction. The worship ye profess
Is not of the Messiah, either in form
Or substance. He led us to kneel and pray
Singly and directly unto our Father,
Who is in heaven: ye pray to a crowd of gods
Created out of men; and to their effigies,
In wood and stone, fall down in idol worship.
He taught humility, forgiveness, peace,
Ye practise pride, revenge, and bloodshed.
He enjoined chastity; ye throw yourselves
Into a life of sinful celibacy.
He commended poverty, and ye seek
For riches, pomp, and high authority.
He loved the poor, and came to us as one;
And ye despise, and grind, and trample on them.
The plain and noble edifice he raised,
And left us as a perfect pattern, ye
O'erlay with meretricious ornament
Of gaudy rites, and superstitious forms;
And, the sole sacrifice He taught to offer,
A heart meek, pure, and grateful, ye disdain.
Is it not thus?

FATHER ANSELM.

I own that much abuse
Hath crept into the church, which, gentle means,
The prayers and labours of her worthier sons
(And she hath many worthy of her trust,)
May gradually remove. A watchful eye,
A firm, unshrinking hand, are, at all times,
Demanded for her weal and governance;

But yet, forget not 'twas this church that taught
The sacred truth to all those barbarous tribes,
That, as a torrent, swept away the power
Of pagan and imperial Rome. 'Twas she,
The mighty civilizer, she alone,
Armed with the cross of Christ, subdued the conqueror,
Tamed the fierce savage, broke his bloody sword,
Curbed his wild passions, cast her awful shield
Between him and the poor, the innocent,
And helpless; unrelentingly enforced
The sanctity of marriage, and thus raised
Degraded woman to her station due.
Then came, alas! long days of rest and ease,
Discipline relaxed, negligence stole in,
And with them, all thou dost condemn so justly.
Much, too, may be truly urged against the rule
Of celibacy, and monastic life;
But in those lawless times, and even in ours,
How very far the good exceeds the evil!
Such was, and is, our state, that we require
A portion of our fellow-beings apart
From all the impure temptations of the world,
To instruct, defend, and guide. With them preserved,
The seeds of ancient art and science lie,
Which time will gradually bring forth to use.
The culture of the long neglected earth,
That first of man's material benefits,
Their wisdom and their industry insured:
Round the monastic dwelling plenty sprang,
Pouring its blessings freely o'er the land;
Within the sacred roof the young were taught,
The sick were healed, the 'nighted traveller sheltered;
And, above all, the young and orphan female
Found there a safe and honourable home.
A time may come when such communities
Will be no longer useful, or desired;
Heaven speed that time! for it would argue clear
A social state superior far to ours.
In the meanwhile, we firmly must oppose
The spiritual power unto the arm of flesh,
The papal to the kingly, the robed prelate
To the armed man of blood and battle.
Imperfect and degenerate as our church

May have become, we're bound to her support;
Or we let loose upon the world, once more,
The elements of demoniac confusion.
Forget not those who serve her are but men,
Subject, as such, to frailties, follies, vices;
Neither forget that should a part withdraw,
And form unto themselves what they conceive
A purer mode, the same objection holds.
They are but men, and their new altar ever
As open to defacement and decay.
Therefore, in lieu of violent secession,
Casting themselves without the church's pale,
Let all good men unite to prop, restore,
And cleanse the unseemly rust of centuries
From off the venerable pile, and not
In cruel haste, abandon it. Remember
That all division weakens; Christianity,
If split into contending sects, each eager
To annihilate the rest, becomes the jeer
And scorn of infidels. Far from converting,
According to her solemn mission, she
Herself is placed in danger of destruction.
Division's weakness, unity is strength—
A tower of strength; the Christian church, if *one*,
And only one, in spite of all defects,
Will make a Christian world. Let us, therefore,
Be firm in union, as constant in repair.
For one division, hundreds will arise;
Christian to Saracen will be less furious,
Than such divided sects towards each other.

LORD COBHAM.

Now God forbid I should destroy one atom
Of the pure model left unto our charge!
But mark me, father; not decay brought on
By mere neglect, alone demands repair;
An easy task compared to the lopping off
Those foul excrescences by time engendered;
So firmly rooted on the original,
That severance without annihilation
Would seem impossible. All must be razed;
And on the immutable foundation, we
Must pray to the great Founder to assist

Our puny efforts with His grace; to enlighten
The darkness of our ignorance; to check
The frailties and caprice of human will;
And finally, to grant His temple may
Arise renewed, the world's great sanctuary,
Where all who labour may find rest. This eve
I lay the corner-stone of this great work,
My life-blood the libation poured upon it.
And great is the reward! I feel it now—
For my glad spirit, with prophetic power,
Beholds this nation rising in her might
From the dull sleep of ages, casting off
The blood-stained trammels of deceiving Rome,
And at the fount of heavenly truth itself
Imbibing life eternal. Lord of heaven,
Sanctify my death to this great purpose!

FATHER ANSELM.

My mission is in vain.

LORD COBHAM.

Not so, good father:
Thine honest opposition hath aroused
My faculties, somewhat subdued by tears
And silence. My faith is strengthened, hope confirmed.
Still pray for me, my friend, for thou art pious,
According to thy conscience; therefore pray!

FATHER ANSELM.

In sackcloth and in ashes will I pray,
And fast, and mourn for thee. And, at the last
I shall be near.

LORD COBHAM.

Then wilt thou see me smile
Triumphant in my agonies. Farewell!

FATHER ANSELM.

May God have mercy on thee!

[*Exit.*]

LORD COBHAM.

Amen! amen!
Death, where is thy sting? Each hour my soul, refreshed,
Glows with new vigour, eager for her flight.

With whatsoever throes my mortal frame
May yield up its ærial visitant,
Over them all will roll a flood of bliss—
Upborne in light and joy upon the wings
Of the commissioned ministers of Heaven!
Ay; at this moment they are gathering round—
I own their presence in the thrilling awe
Imprest upon my mortal being—I feel it
In the deep ecstasy, the ardent struggles,
Of that which is immortal. [*Throws himself on his knees.*]

Enter DE LISLE (approaching gently.)

DE LISLE.

He is absorbed
In prayer; and in his strangely beaming eye,
That ecstasy of faith which mocks all reason!
Oh, Faith! thou beautiful illusion! Natural
To man as Hope, but far less innocent!
In all parts of the earth thy victims bleed,
Of all religions—offered to all gods.
Behold thy Christian martyr here! A man,
'Till touched by thee, of sound and steadfast mind;
Following, like all wise men, the worship found
Established in his father-land, without
Pondering too deep its knotty points
Of practice or belief.

LORD COBHAM (*rising.*)

Who art thou?

DE LISLE.

Dear lord!

LORD COBHAM.

De Lisle! From what far region of the earth
Have the winds wafted, or the waters borne thee,
That thus so suddenly thou stand'st before me,
In this most awful hour?

DE LISLE.

I thank the winds

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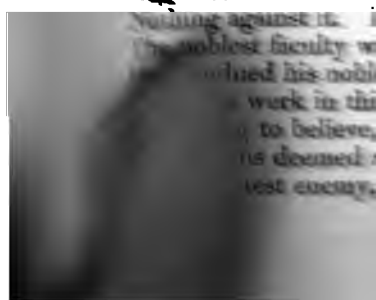
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No movement dare she make, no question ask,
No answer give, but mute, hood-winked, and bound,
Is yielded up at Superstition's feet.

LORD COBHAM.

And, in accord with reason, what believest thou ?

DE LISLE.

That, as rational beings, we find ourselves
Inhabitants of a fair world, most fair,
Not free from evil, but with good abounding.
Of its prime formation, and our own origin,
We may conjecture much, but nothing know.
All evidence concurs to our belief,
That we are but a speck in boundless space ;
An unit among myriads innumerable,
All moving on the same harmonious plan,
Subject to the same unvarying law supreme.
Amazing and stupendous is this thought,
Yet Reason doth admit it readily ;
And from our unit to the universe expands
Her sole conclusion, from the great whole derived :
That all is governed by one intellect,
One will, one power, free from antagonism.
Here Reason pauses, and perceives her boundary :
Aught more or less than this is nought.

LORD COBHAM.

For evil,

How dost thou account ?

DE LISLE.

Reason *accounts* for nothing.
Evil exists ;—we know as little wherefore
As that good exists : perchance permitted
For us to overcome, our task, and the condition
Of our being.

LORD COBHAM.

On Providence ?

DE LISLE.

My belief,
That Mind governs the universe, implies

And waves that have thus kindly favoured me ;
Another day, and I had been too late.

LORD COBHAM.

Oh, rather say thou art a day too soon !
My cruel death will sorely wring thy heart ;
And to the wound no medicine can I bring ;
No hope, no solace. Thy creed admits of none !

DE LISLE.

Oh, pardon me, thou great and noble sufferer !
Who diest for conscience' sake, and therefore art
Most worthy of the reverence of all good men,
Howe'er they differ in religious creed.
Deem not of me thus ! I, too, have hope ; ay,
More than hope, as strong conviction as thyself,
That thy firm honesty of purpose pass not
Without observance—in itself reward—
From the all-ruling spirit of the universe.

LORD COBHAM.

Spirit of the universe ! What ! still misled
By such fond heathen jargon ! pursuing ever
Gigantic shadows o'er the realm of chaos,
Without a resting-place for the tired wing
Of wild Imagination ; dragging with her
Reluctant Reason down the dread abyss
Of utter and unfathomable darkness !
Shake off the follies and the pride of both
These erring guides ! Chain down Imagination,
And tame thy reason to a child's simplicity,
And meekly learn the truths of thy salvation !

DE LISLE.

Aught consistent with my reason will I learn ;
Nothing against it. I will not debase
The noblest faculty with which our Maker
Hath endued his noblest creature ; therefore,
His prime work in this part of creation,
By striving to believe, or act against it.
All religions deemed *revealed*, wisely subdue
Their greatest enemy, our Reason, first ;

No movement dare she make, no question ask,
No answer give, but mute, hood-winked, and bound,
Is yielded up at Superstition's feet.

LORD COBHAM.

And, in accord with reason, what believest thou ?

DE LISLE.

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Inhabitants of a fair world, most fair,
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That we are but a speck in boundless space ;
An unit among myriads innumerable,
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Reason *accounts* for nothing.
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As that good exists : perchance permitted
For us to overcome, our task, and the condition
Of our being.

LORD COBHAM.

On Providence ?

DE LISLE.

My belief,
That Mind governs the universe, implies

Confidence in an universal Providence,
 Preserver, as Creator, omnipresent.
 But the minute and ceaseless interference,
 In the affairs of men, which ye call Providence,
 Reason and experience equally reject.

LORD COBHAM.

On immortality ?

DE LISLE.

As it would seem,
 No grain of matter is e'er lost, although
 Changing unceasingly, we may presume
 Such stern economy is not applied
 Solely to brute matter. I, in truth, believe,
 (As consonant to reason, though unproved)
 Spirit to be eternal—self-existent,
 Incapable of annihilation ;
 Emanating, rather than created ;
 Varying in degrees of strength and purity ;
 Opening, closing, through different states of being ;
 Punished by alienation from, rewarded
 By approaching nearer to, its ultimate
 Absorption in the essence of the Deity.

LORD COBHAM.

I cannot but admire the power of mind,
 That, through such bold gradations, hath arrived
 At such a consummation. I admire,
 But pity and condemn. First, to exalt reason,
 As a guide infallible, when round us
 No reasonable creature do we find,
 Who, through one single day, can pass without
 Some slip or error.

DE LISLE.

Such are made *against*,
 Not in obedience to, the voice of Reason.
 We must not blame our guide if we permit
 Passion to obscure, Vice to enthral, Superstition
 To debase her ; for Reason, like all else,
 Hath her besetting evils, such as these ;
 She conquers, or is conquered. In herself
 Solely, she's all sufficient for this life.

LORD COBHAM.

Freed from these evils, she is all sufficient;
But they, it seems, beset and oft subdue her;
Therefore is she weak, and to her aid is sent
In mercy and in love, (the depth of which
She scarce can comprehend, less estimate,)
The Christian revelation.

DE LISLE.

Good my lord,
I come here less to argue, than to implore
That thou wouldst save thyself, by any means,
From the dread fate these maniacs prepare; agree
To all—sign anything—humour them—escape!
Thy questions I have answered, showing rather
In what I believe, than in what I disbelieve.
Draw thine own conclusion. I trifle not
With difference of forms and creeds—striking
At the very root of superstition,
I would destroy it from the earth, whate'er
Its shape, its maxims, or its practices;
Believing, as I do, that there exists no proof
That man, through all his generations, ever held
Visible communion with the Deity,
Known to us only through His glorious works.

LORD COBHAM.

Seek for that communion, and thou'lt find it!
Pray, and thy prayer shall be responded to;
And, in her secret depths, thine erring spirit
Will tremblingly acknowledge that response.
Oh, listen to my dying words, De Lisle!
And 'grave them on thy heart, and think of them
When thou art near to death, as I am now.
Thy philosophy's a vain delusion,
Thy wisdom folly, and thy boasted reason
A traitorous snare. Yet truly hast thou said
That there is no perfection in this world:
None was intended—'tis a state of trial,
The antagonistic power thou dost disown,
Evil, struggled for man, and human reason
Signally failed to guard him. Our first parents

Reasoned, and disobeyed, and fell; the same
 Do we: we reason, disobey, and fall.
 Thus all mankind would have been lost indeed,
 Had not celestial love and pity intervened.
 The spirit of their God moved among men,
 As erst above the dark abyss of chaos;
 A second time it said, Let there be light!
 And there was light. The boon was undeserved,
 And though by our Redeemer dearly bought,
 To us 'twas freely given; mercy was won,
 And justice was severely satisfied.
 Learn that in wild and wayward youth, De Lisle,
 I was, what thou art now, an infidel;
 Brought down to such by Rome's degenerate church;
 And had by heart the jargon of the infidel;
 All thou hast expressed, and all that thou hast not.
 When, like to the apostle Paul, a voice,
 Secret, but as clear and as unsought for, called
 To my labouring and restless spirit; I prayed—
 And from that moment, through my thorny path,
 Through sacrifice and suffering, e'en till now,
 With an excruciating death at hand, all,
 All is peace and joy within. Unbeliever!
 There is a spiritual sense thou hast not found,
 Subtler, purer, higher far than reason,
 By which thou mayst hold converse with thy God.
 My parting soul shall plead for thine, imploring
 The fountain of free *grace* to be unsealed
 For thy salvation. Fare thee well!

DE LISLE.

Farewell!

Peace to thy noble, but deluded spirit!

[Exit.]

LORD COBHAM.

Our Lord was tempted by the prince of tempters;
 And, as in all things else, so He in this
 Left us His example. To the weak in grace,
 How strong the trial, when a man held blameless
 By the world, moral, wise, beneficent,
 Rejects the gospel's aid! 'tis the arch-fiend's
 Most specious snare. Save this lost soul, O Lord!

Recall the self-willed wanderer to thy flock,
And far and wide let his redemption shine!
And now, my soul, to thy last preparation!
Set Him who bore upon his bleeding brow
The thorns that crowned him monarch of this world,
Whose throne was the excruciating cross;
Set Him before thee! His forgiving meekness,
His angelic patience, enduring more
Than mortals can conceive of agony! With Him,
For Him, thou sufferest, faithful to the end.
Ecstatic, elevating thought! no insult
Can subdue, no torment wrench it from me!
A few more hours to dry the tears of those
I love and leave—and this earth's woes are past.

SCENE THE LAST.

A Court within the Walls of the Tower.

LORD COBHAM *supporting* MATILDA. BISHOP OF LONDON,
and other Prelates. SIR CLEMENT FANSHAWE. SIR
EDWARD MORLAND. *The* GOVERNOR. LAURA. *Guards*
and Others.

LORD COBHAM.

Matilda! give not way to this excess!
Thy fortitude is needful as mine own
To the perfection of our task, as well
As to the efficacy of our example.
Look up, dear love! at this last hour of trial
I hoped for firmness, calmness, resignation.

MATILDA.

I am calm now—oh! very, very calm;
But—let them not tear me from thee!—let me
Cling thus—thus—till the last—the very last!
I will be silent as the dark, dark grave.

LORD COBHAM (*embracing her tenderly.*)

Lay thy head here as thou art wont, and close
Thine eyes as if in slumber: when thou wak'st,

Think that I am near thee though invisible;
 That I watch over thee, and pray with thee;
 And that my spirit soon will call to thine,
 To share in its beatitude immortal.—
 Alas! e'en as I speak all sense hath fled,
 And mercy spares her the extremest pang.
 But one kiss more, upon this icy brow,
 These bloodless lips! Dear sufferer, fare thee well!
 (*To Sir Clement.*) Receive her to thy heart and home once
 more,

Kind, good old man! thy tears assure forgiveness
 For all the sorrows brought on thy white hairs,
 But we shall meet where sin and sorrow cease.
 Laura, too, our firmly faithful Laura!
 No need to bid thee comfort thy poor lady;
 Nor, for her sake to curb those swelling sobs.
 My dying blessing on thee! Bear her gently hence.

[*MATILDA is borne off.*]

(*After a pause.*) The bitterest pang is o'er. My reverend
 lords—
 Sir Governor—I wait your orders.

SIR EDWARD.

My lord,
 Is there for thee or thine aught in my power—

LORD COBHAM.

Pray thee commend me to the king, Sir Edward,
 My loved and honoured sovereign! Tell his grace,
 The dear remembrance of his generous friendship
 Is warm as ever on my heart. I know
 His kindly nature will deplore my fate;
 But in that natural grief, let him beware
 Remorse fix not her venom'd fang. As little
 Could Rome destroy as England save, without
 Divine permission. Fare thee well, good friend!

*
 BISHOP and PRIESTS advance.

BISHOP.

Methinks we have fulfilled to the extreme,
 Our lenient sovereign's strongly urged behest,

Awaiting thus in patience on thy leisure.
My lord, from all on earth thou partest now;
Time closes fast upon thee, and eternity,
Dread, boundless, unredeemable eternity,
Lies but a single step beyond. O yet,
Ere thou dost take that final step, receive
Such blessed comfort as the church allows!
Oh, rush not to the presence of thy God,
With the deep wounds of sin upon thy soul,
Unseared and unannealed, the healing balm
Of absolution utterly rejected!

LORD COBHAM.

*Gainst ye I have no sins to answer for,
Then wherefore should I seek *your* absolution?
Its want I feel not where I never trespassed.
But unto thee, my God, (*kneeling*) I kneel indeed!
'Gainst Thee a grievous sinner have I been!
In my frail youth how oft have I offended
By my ungoverned passions! urged by them,
What woes upon my fellow-creatures brought!
Have mercy on me, Lord! from Thee I need,
And to thee humbly pray for absolution.

[*Rises.*

BISHOP.

Then die with all thy sins upon thy head!
Accursed die, and excommunicate,
Thy body to the flames, thy soul to Satan!

LORD COBHAM.

*Lo! these are your guides, good people—listen!
For violation of God's holy law
They never cursed me; but for breaking through
Their own appointments, and their own traditions,
They curse and murder me! Ye priests of Belial,
Know, by the burning embers this night kindled,
England will read, and in her heart of hearts
Will treasure up the truths for which I die!
The cup of your iniquity is full;
God's vengeance is at hand, to drive ye out
This chosen land for ever!

* His own words.

PRIESTS.

Away with him !

LORD COBHAM (*Guards seizing him.*)

Yea, with my dying breath will I proclaim
My country's freedom from the chains of Rome !
The word of prophecy and power is forth,
It will not perish in the flames with me ;
But, rising from my ashes, phoenix-like,
Will hurl the mocking fiend, that sits enthroned
Upon your seven-hilled city, back to his realms
Of everlasting night. *His* ministers ye are ;
Obey the master ye have chosen—lead on !

THE END.







